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ABSTRACT

Noting that Lekotek means "play library" in Swedish, this brief report describes the Lekotek Center, a resource and support center for the parents of disabled children under the age of five, which is affiliated with the Galesburg (Illinois) Public Library. Background on the Lekotek organization, whose goal is to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream of society, is followed by a description of its audience and the need for its services, i.e., providing a toy, game, and book-lending library for children up to five years old. Activities funded through the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) and Title II of the Higher Education Act (finding an adaptive toy maker, training staff in the Lekotek method, and conducting public awareness activities) are described, and a summary of the project's budget for fiscal year 1987 is provided. The results of a first-year survey of families participating in the program are reported. Finally, instructions are provided for obtaining further information about Lekotek and the Galesburg Public Library Lekotek project. (GL)

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LEKOTEK CENTER

by

Betty Babanoury

January 1990

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Lekotek Center

Background: This project, at the Galesburg Public Library, Galesburg, Illinois, is based on the program established by Lekotek, an international organization whose purpose is to establish resource and support centers for the parents of disabled children. Lekotek, which means "play library" in Swedish, provides parents with the practical services they need to care for and educate their children. Traditionally these services include family counseling, home loan of materials and equipment, support groups, referral to other service providers, home visitation, and sibling consultation. The two features that make the Lekotek program unique are the family-child-leader oriented service and the lending of toys and equipment, which frequently are unavailable or unknown to parents of handicapped children. Many of the toys are so highly specialized, they are prohibitively expensive or difficult to obtain, and would not be available to parents except through this lending service. There are a number of Lekotek centers in the United States, but only one other, in Far Rockaway, New York, is affiliated with a public library.

Audience: Disabled children under the age of 5 and their families. The project's original goal was to recruit at least 24 families for monthly visits. By the end of the first year of operation, 67 families were participating.

Need: In 1987, the project's first year, Illinois did not mandate services for handicapped children under the age of 3. Of the approximately 950 handicapped children in the two-county Knox-Warren Special Education Cooperative District, 132 are in this age group. Studies have shown that a child's most critical developmental years are from birth to 3 years of age and intervention programs such as Lekotek can help them progress quickly and achieve high levels of functioning. To reach Lekotek's goal of integrating children with disabilities into the mainstream of society, the project provides a toy-, game-, and book-lending library to those up to 5 years old.

Objectives:

- To provide space as well as new and adaptive toys, games, and books for the center;
- To train center staff in the Lekotek method;
- To publicize center services; and
- To cooperate with other organizations and agencies.

Budget: Total for fiscal year 1987 (initial year of funding): $20,000 from Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) Title I funds; and $25,000 from the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Activities: Preparations for the Lekotek Center services involved: Finding an adaptive toy maker who built some pieces of special equipment and adapted others; training staff through a Lekotek clinic and internship sessions; and conducting public awareness activities such as presentations to home extension clubs, churches, aerobic classes, schools, libraries, rehabilitation centers, local health service organizations, and private service providers. Television coverage, newspaper articles, and Lekotek posters placed in public access buildings in five counties generated numerous inquiries about the program. Currently the

project hires one Lekotek leader who works 30 or more hours a week. Volunteers handle processing, maintenance, and check-out of the toys.

Evaluation: A first-year survey of families participating in the Lekotek program revealed that parents of the younger children (below age 3) especially appreciated the borrowed toys and the leader's assistance, but were equivocal about the value of the program's location in a library. Parents of the older children (age 3 and up) were enthusiastic about the library/Lekotek connection. Each child's progress was carefully documented from month to month by the Lekotek leader, and these profiles have provided useful information on the effectiveness of parent-child play. A representative of the National Lekotek Center made a site visit to evaluate the project at the end of the first year of operation and identified three significant strengths:

- Sibling-parent relationships were strengthened by the Center's sessions;
- The children's progress was measurable, as shown by the Lekotek leader's evaluations; and
- The library/Lekotek relationship was valuable as it encouraged parents to borrow picture books, enroll their children in the summer reading program, and take them to library story hours.

The project has been expanded to serve eight other Western Illinois Library System libraries beyond the 50-mile area of Galesburg.

Adoption: For general information about Lekotek and the rental or purchase of videotapes of this and other projects, contact: Ange Peebles, National Lekotek Center, 2100 Ridge Ave., Evanston, IL 60204, (708) 328–0001. For on-site visits, telephone consultations, and specific information about the Galesburg Public Library/Lekotek project, contact the person whose name and address appear below.

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